



The Golden Fish



The Golden Fish



An Uzbek
Fairy Tale

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Translated by Fainna Solasko



Malysh Publishers



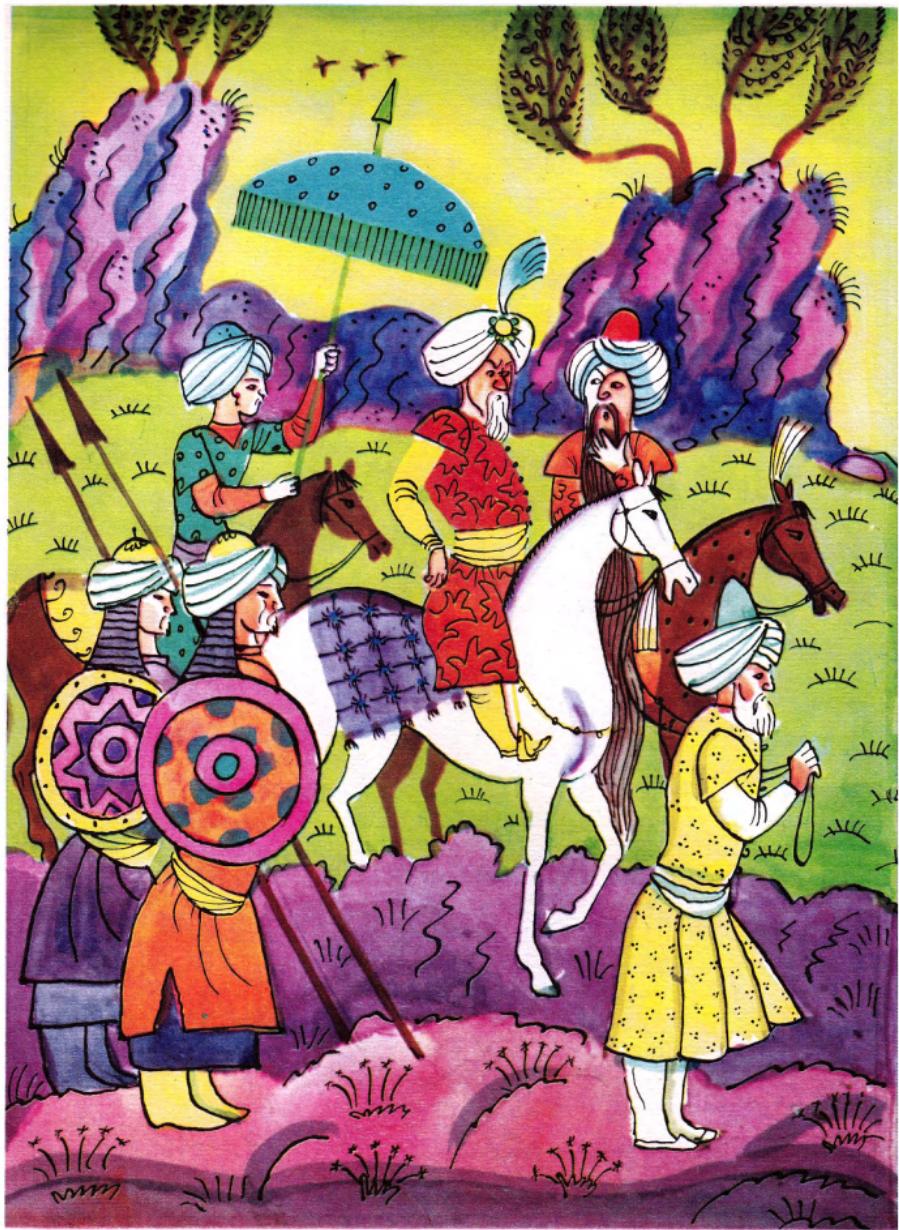


Once upon a time, long, long ago, an old fisherman and his only son lived by the side of the sea. They were very poor, for all they had were an old boat and a net. As he worked and helped his father, the young fisherman would sing the whole day long.

Once the old man cast his net into the sea as usual. When he pulled it up he saw a single fish thrashing about in it, but this was no ordinary fish: it was golden.

The old man was astonished. "Keep an eye on this amazing fish while I go off to tell the khan about it," he said to his son. "The khan may give us a fine reward for it." And the old man trudged off.

¹⁰ Khan—an Asian ruler.

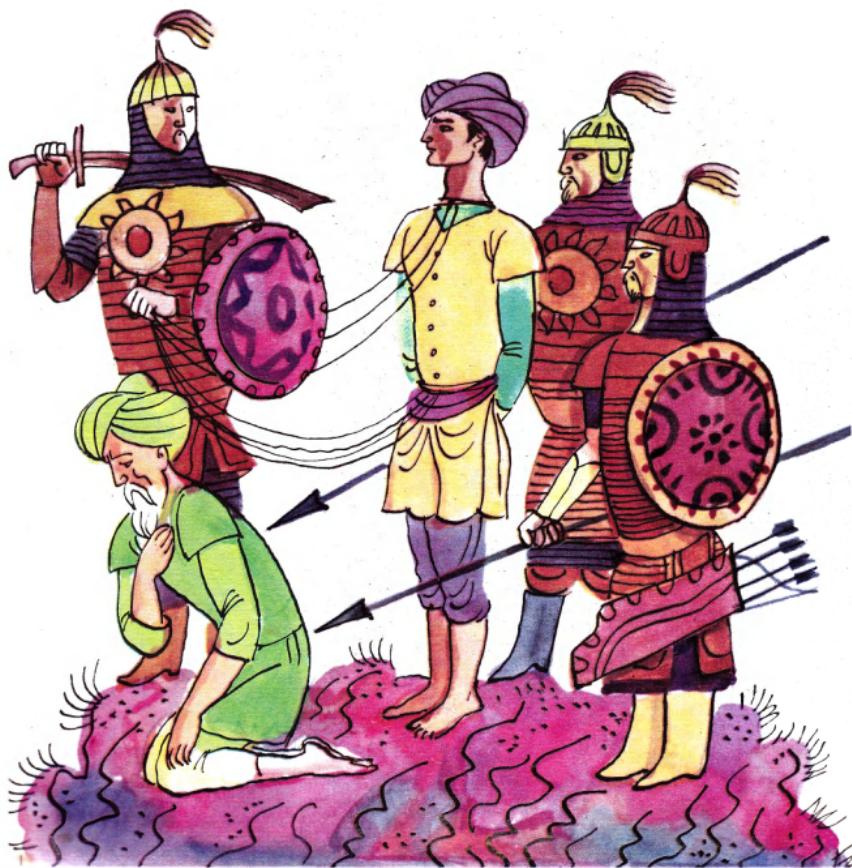


The young fisherman could not bear to see the fish struggling so desperately in the net, and so he let it go.

The golden fish flipped its tail and disappeared beneath the waves.

Soon the khan rode up. Riding behind him were his attendants and bodyguards.

“Well, let’s see your amazing fish,” said the khan.





The young fisherman hung his head and replied, "I was sorry for the beautiful fish and let it go."

This enraged the khan. "You miserable old wretch!" he screamed at the old fisherman. "How dared you and your worthless pup of a son disturb my royal sleep? How dared you play a trick on me, the finest of the fine, and Allah's favorite son? And who ever heard of golden fish swimming about



in the sea?"

At this the khan's vizier shook his long beard, which was so long it dragged along the ground, and said, "I've lived to be a hundred, yet never have I heard of such a wonder."

The old fisherman pleaded with the khan to believe him, but all his talk of the golden fish only made the khan angrier still. Finally, the khan ordered the young fisherman to be

bound hand and foot and put out to sea in the fisherman's old boat.

The khan returned to his palace feeling very pleased with himself. Meanwhile, the poor old fisherman stood at the water's edge, watching the waves carry his only son farther and farther out to sea. He did not know what to do, nor how to save his son.

When at last the boat disappeared from sight, the old man fell to the ground and wept bitterly, calling down evil on the cruel khan.

The young fisherman lay in the bottom of the boat,







knowing he could not last long, for he was being carried farther and farther out to sea.

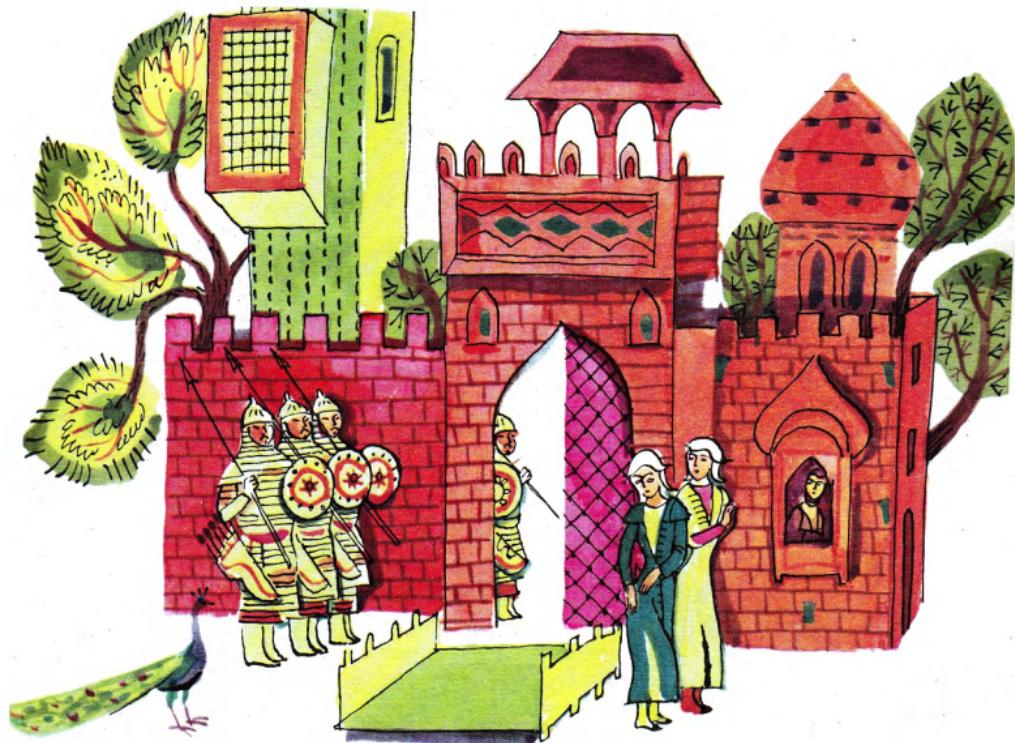
At last, an island appeared on the horizon, and the tide carried the boat to the shore. The very moment it nosed into the sand, a youth stepped out from behind a tree. Surely, this was a wonder: he was the exact image of the young fisherman. They were as alike as two halves of an apple.



The youth came over to the boat and untied the young fisherman, who embraced him and thanked him for his kindness. Then the youth took a flatcake from his bag, broke it in two and offered half to the young fisherman. They became friends and were soon as inseparable as two brothers.

One day, when the two youths were walking along, they came upon an old man tending his flock. As they had always





thought they were the only two people on the island, they went over to greet him. This is the tale the shepherd told them:

"A three days' journey will take you across the island to a land whose khan is most unhappy. His only daughter, the greatest beauty in the world, has never uttered a word in her life. The khan has made it known that he who cures her will receive a reward of great value, but that he who tries to cure her and fails will be beheaded. Many a young man has lost his life in the khan's palace in this way."

The two friends marvelled at his tale and decided to try their luck. When they reached the palace gates, the youth said to the young fisherman, "Let me try first. If I succeed and cure the khan's daughter, I'll share the gifts I receive with you."

The young fisherman agreed, and so the youth entered the palace.

Two serving maids greeted him and said, "Many a fine young man has tried to cure the khan's daughter and lost his life when he failed. Beware! You, too, will go to your death."

But the brave youth boldly entered the princess's chambers, bowed low and said, "Beautiful princess, listen to my tale. My father has three sons. One day we went to the forest for firewood. My eldest brother cut off a branch and carved a bird that was so wondrous it looked as if it were alive. My elder brother went into the thicket and returned with the rarest of feathers with which he adorned the wooden bird. Indeed, it became still more beautiful. I found an enchanted spring, and when I bathed the bird in the clear water, it came to life, trilled its song and flew away.

"We've argued ever since, for each of us says that the bird was his. I don't think we'll ever stop arguing. I've come to you to ask you to decide which of us is right. Which of us should have owned the bird? You tell us."

The young princess sat up, and her long dark lashes trembled. A smile touched her lips, but she uttered not a word. Instead, she raised a finger to her mouth and shook her head.

The youth became angry and cried, "If I've got to die now because of you, then let your head roll as mine will!" At this he whipped out his saber and sliced the air.

The princess was terror-stricken. She fell to the ground and screamed. At that very instant a white snake wriggled out of her mouth. The youth stamped on it and crushed its head.

The princess's eyes filled with tears. She slipped a ring from her finger and said, "Take this ring to my father, and he will reward you."

The youth took the ring and ran to where his friend awaited him. The young fisherman hurried forth to embrace him. The



youth told him of all that had happened while he was in the palace and handed him the ring.

"Now I can tell you my secret," the youth said. "I'm the golden fish you felt sorry for and let out of the net. When you sang as you worked, word of your beautiful songs reached my father, the King of the Sea. I begged him to let me swim up to the water's edge and listen to your songs, but when I did, I was so carried away by your singing that I became entangled in the net. And then you set me free. When the evil khan's men bound you and set you out to sea in that little boat, I called my faithful friends, the fishes, to my aid and asked them to support your little boat on their backs so that it would not capsize. My faithful friends did me this favor and guided your boat to the island.

"I was waiting for you there in the guise of a youth who was the image of you. In the short while we've spent together I've come to really know how good and kind you are. I've come to love you as a brother. Now it is time for me to return to my land beneath the sea. Take this ring, go to the khan and receive the reward he has promised.

"If you are ever in need of me, go to the edge of the sea and call to me three times in a row. I'll always come to your aid."

With these words the youth suddenly turned into a glittering golden fish and disappeared into the sparkling sea.

The young fisherman stood gazing at the spot where his friend had vanished and then headed off sadly towards the palace.

Inside the palace the old khan bowed low to the young fisherman and said, "Your reward shall be the most precious treasure I have, the light of my eyes, my only daughter. She will be your wife, and may you live happily ever after."

One of the khan's servants brought the young fisherman a fine gold-stitched robe that was studded with pearls and rubies.

The next day the young fisherman and the khan's daughter were married. There was music and much merrymaking at the great wedding feast.



The young princess soon noticed that her husband was often sad and would sigh unhappily. One day she asked him tenderly what grieved him so.

"I really don't know how to tell you," he said. "Here in the palace there is everything one might ever wish for. There is nothing to cloud one's joy here. But I'm not used to a life of idleness. My hands have always been busy working. I feel restless when there's no work for them to do."





“I grew up far away from here, on a golden, sandy shore. My father, whom I love dearly, is all alone there now. He’s getting old, and death cannot be too far away. If you could only come away with me, back to my father’s house, I’d be the happiest man in the world. But I want you to know that in my country you won’t be able to live in luxury like a khan’s daughter, with serving maids to wait on you. There you’ll just be the wife of a poor fisherman.”

“I’ll gladly do anything to make you happy, for if you are happy, I will be, too,” said the princess. “But how can we cross the sea? No one here knows how to build a boat.”

“I’ll find a way. Meanwhile, you make ready for the journey.”

When the princess went off to make ready for the journey, her husband headed for the shore and called out loudly three times in a row. The golden fish came up to the surface and said,

“What is it you wish me to do, faithful friend?”

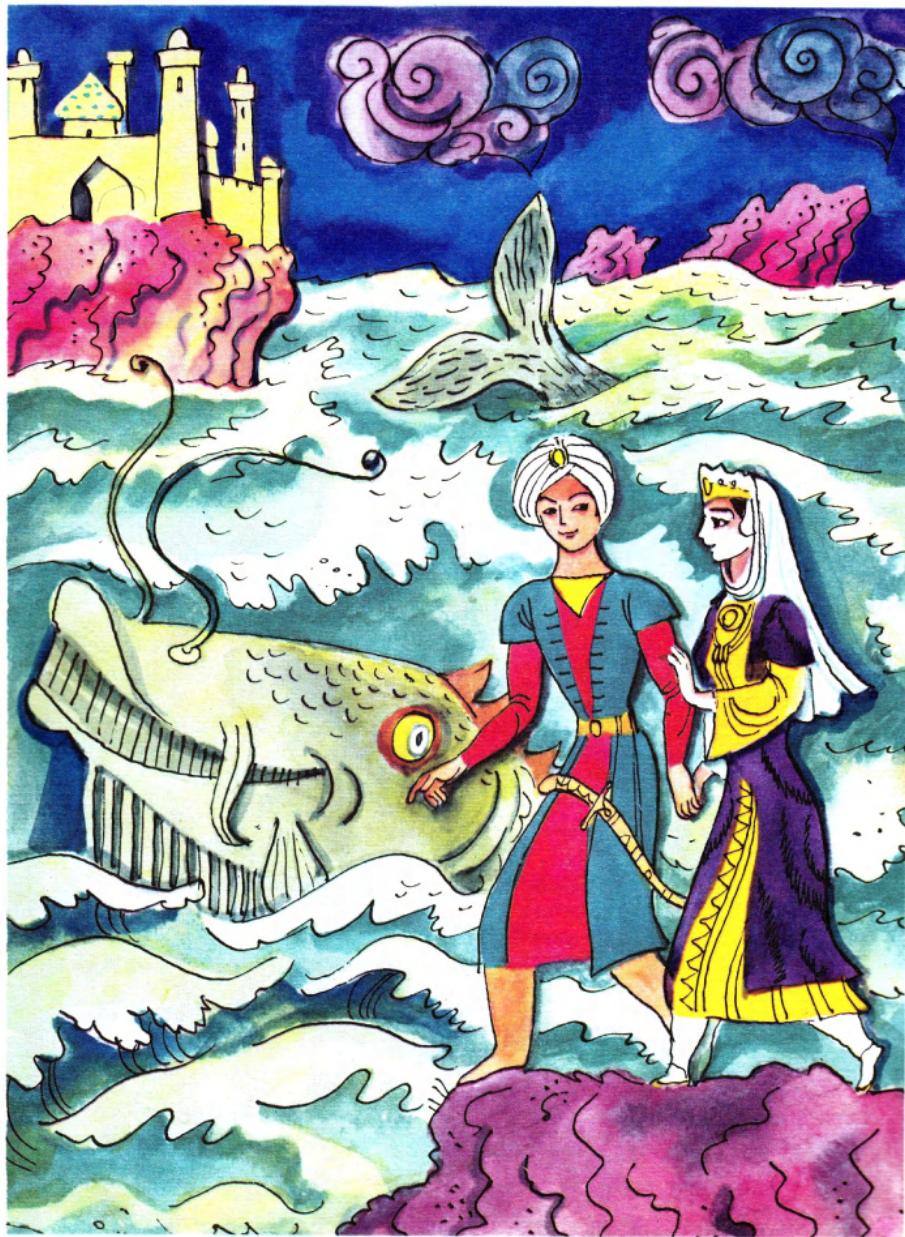
“I’m so homesick. I want to go back to my homeland, to see my father I love so dearly. But we’ve neither a boat nor a ship in which to cross the sea, and my old boat has fallen apart.”

“You’ll have your wish. As soon as night falls, I’ll send you a great fish. A giant fish. You and your wife must enter its mouth without fear, and you’ll be home by morning.”

“But what if the fish swallows us?”

“Never fear. Its looks are terrifying, but it’s the kindest soul alive. I must leave you now. Goodbye, and have a good journey.” A moment later the golden fish was gone beneath the waves.

Night fell. Suddenly, the sea became stormy, and a huge monster of a fish came swimming up to the shore. A fountain of water spurted from a blow-hole in the top of its head. It moved its tail slowly, but this was enough to raise huge waves that came crashing down all about, for this was truly a giant fish.

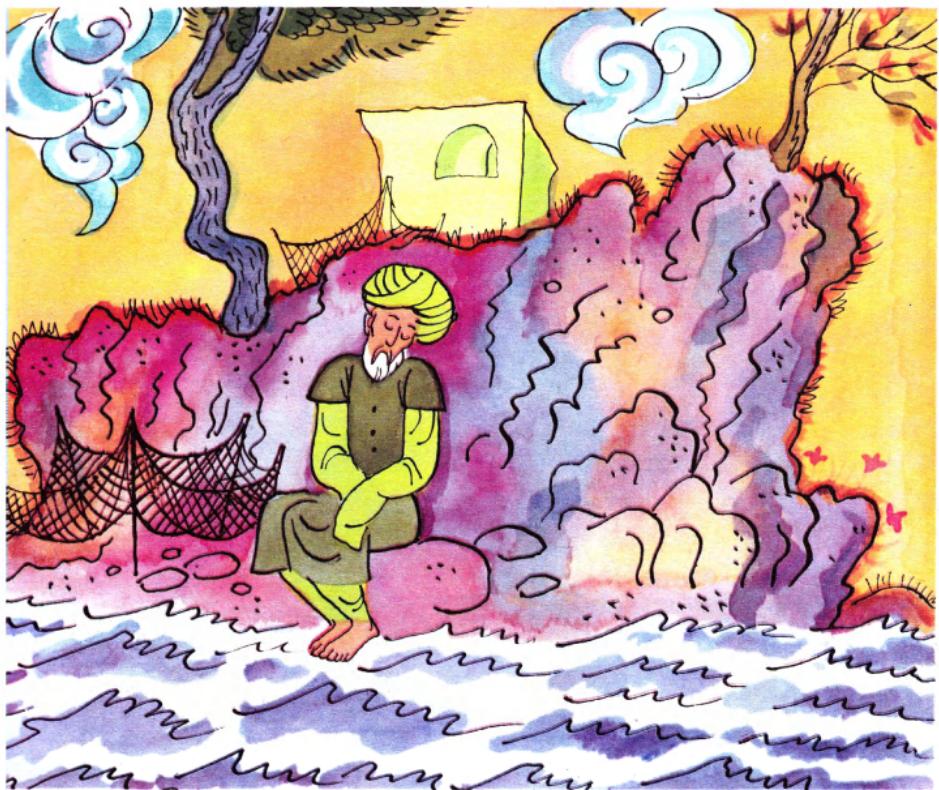




When the princess saw the monster she began to tremble, but her husband calmed her fears, took her hand and led her straight into the fish's mouth. The moment they entered, the fish closed its mouth and set off across the sea.

It swam so smoothly and cautiously that the swaying motions of its body soon put the young couple to sleep.

By morning the magic fish had crossed the sea. At last, it stopped swimming and opened its mouth.



The hot rays of the sun fell upon the young fisherman and awakened him. He opened his eyes and saw his native shore, the old hut in which he had been born and there, sitting all alone beside it, his own dear father.

The young fisherman was truly amazed, but overjoyed, and no wonder, for he was home again at last.

He ran up to his father and embraced him, and then led his young wife over.

What rejoicing there was that day!
From then on the three of them lived happily ever after in a
small fisherman's cottage in their own land.





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